CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL

Leucha Road Conservation Area

INTRODUCTION

This document is an "appraisal" document as defined by English Heritage in their guidance document "Conservation Area Appraisals".

The purpose of the document is, to quote from the English Heritage document, to ensure that "the special interest justifying designation is clearly defined and analysed in a written appraisal of its character and appearance". This provides a "sound basis, defensible on appeal, for development plan policies and development control decisions" and also forms the basis for further work on design guidance and enhancement proposals.

This appraisal describes and analyses the particular character of the Leucha Road Conservation Area which was designated by the Council in 1990. This includes the more obvious aspects such as buildings, spaces and architectural development, as well as an attempt to portray the often less tangible qualities which make the area "special".

PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

(i) National Policies – Individual buildings "of special architectural or historic interest" have enjoyed a means of statutory protection since the 1950's, but the concept of protecting areas of special merit, rather than individual buildings, was first brought under legislative control with the passing of the Civic Amenities Act in 1967. A crucial difference between the two is that Listed buildings are assessed against national criteria, with Lists being drawn up by English Heritage. Conservation Areas by contrast are designated by Local Authorities on more local criteria, and are therefore very varied in character. However, general guidance on the designation of Conservation Areas is included in Planning Policy Guidance Note 15 (PPG15), which sets out the government's policies on the historic built environment in general. By 2005 there were eleven designated Conservation Areas in Waltham Forest.

(ii) Local Policies – Legislation and guidance has emphasised the importance of including firm Conservation Area policies within the Unitary Development Plan (UDP), which must in turn be based on a clear definition of what constitutes that "special architectural or historic interest" which warranted designation in the first place. Policy BHE13 in the "Built and historic environment" chapter of the adopted Unitary

Development Plan 2006 is the relevant council policy concerning the designation and subsequent control of Conservation Areas within the borough.

In addition Policy 4B.7 of The London Plan produced by the Greater London Authority emphasises the need for boroughs to work with local communities to recognise and manage local distinctiveness, ensuring proposed developments preserve or enhance local social, physical, cultural, historical, environmental and economic characteristics.

DEFINITION OF SPECIAL INTEREST

(i) Location and population:

The Leucha Road Conservation Area is situated in Walthamstow, which since 1965 has been within the London Borough of Waltham Forest. It lies to the west of Walthamstow Town Centre at the very end of the High Street. The Chingford/Liverpool Street railway runs immediately to the south on a raised embankment, and St James Street station is only a matter of yards away.

The Lea Valley with its marshes and reservoirs is a few hundred yards to the west, and Leucha Road and its surrounds lie on the gently rising land running from the valley floor to Church Hill and Walthamstow Village to the east.

The Conservation Area covers a site area of just over an acre and contains 225 properties, with an estimated population of around 500.

(ii) Origins and development of settlement:

In the 18th century Walthamstow was a rural parish with a landscape dominated by farmland, forest and marsh interspersed with the large houses and grounds of wealthy city merchants, bankers and public officials. One of these wealthy residents was Thomas Courtenay Warner of Clock House.

The character of Walthamstow changed dramatically between 1850 and 1900 with the continued expansion of London and the arrival of the railways. The fields and commons rapidly gave way to Victorian housing development, and by 1861 the wealthier classes were moving out. In the 1880's TCT Warner by then residing at Highams Woodford Green, began to develop the Clock House estate and other adjacent land for housing. Part of this initial phase of development was the erection of the Leucha Road properties, and a substantial terraced business development at the western end of the High Street. These properties were built to let, and by 1901 Warners had 2184 weekly tenants. Next to Cameron Corbett they were the biggest builder/estate owner in London.

By the 1960's successive government legislation had made the private rented housing market less financially viable for landlords, and Warners began disposing of its vast housing stock and reinvesting elsewhere. Leucha Road was acquired by Waltham Forest Council in the late 1960's, and by 2000 the remaining stock was sold off into either private or Housing Association ownership. Leucha Road survives as a largely original example of the earliest phase of Warner Estate development.

(iii) The prevailing or former uses within the area and their historic patronage, and the influence of these on the plan form and building types:

Built on a green-field site in 1895 Leucha Road consists exclusively of residential properties, all of which were originally private-rented. TCT Warner himself took great interest in the design of the buildings and reputedly had a hand in the design of the original homes. An architect, Mr John Dunn FRIBA was later employed on the work. The layout of Leucha Road is typical of Victorian high-density residential development featuring largely continuous terraced street frontages. The buildings themselves are two storey maisonettes, or "half houses" as they were called by Warners.

(iv) The archaeological; significance and potential of the area including identification of any scheduled ancient monuments:

The Conservation Area contains no scheduled ancient monuments and only the westernmost tip of the area falls within an archaeological priority zone (APZ) as identified in the Council's Unitary Development Plan.

The APZ includes the whole of the Lea Valley floor area, a rich source of archaeological finds in the past. There is however no specific reason to suspect that the small area in question, having already been developed in the late 19th century, would yield anything of special significance.

(v) The architectural and historic qualities of the buildings and the contribution they make to the special interest of the Conservation Area:

The terraces of "half –house flats" in Leucha Road are constructed of red brick to the ground floor and a mixture of yellow London stocks and red brick dressings to the first floor.The uniform building lines are broken at regular intervals by 2 storey gabled projections all in red brick and originally surmounted by stone ball finials, which serve also to break up the otherwise uniform roof line. The roofs themselves were originally finished in grey welsh slate although this was unfortunately replaced with artificial slate of the same colour in 1990. Painted timber box sash windows are standard original features, as are distinctive painted-timber front doors peculiar to the Warner estates of the period. The doors are found in pairs within recessed porches with decorative keystones and drip mouldings. The terraces are set back from the footpath by approx 3.0m deep front gardens originally bounded by metal railings and privet hedging.

The special interest of the Conservation Area derives from the intrinsic qualities of the buildings concerned, their formal townscape, and the record of social history that they represent. As the bulk of the former Warner estate properties are altered over the years and their original uniformity lost, Leucha Road is intended as a representative sample of the earliest phase of development retaining as much as possible its original appearance.

(vi) The contribution made by key unlisted buildings:

The Conservation Area contains no Listed or locally Listed buildings, and as all the "half-houses" in Leucha Road are essentially the same, each makes an equal contribution to the special character of the area. The two commercial terraces on St James Street by virtue of their larger scale and elaborate terracotta decoration are much more imposing and contrast with the domestic scale and simplicity of the residential p[roperties. Whilst each is essentially identical, the two corner properties that lead into Leucha Road perform a more important visual role, and properly restored and maintained would be worthy gateway features.

(vii) The character and relationship of spaces within the area:

In layout Leucha Road is a traditional example of late Victorian planning, with continuous terraces of housing set back from the footpath behind small front gardens. Many of the original privet hedges which defined the front boundary and enclosed the spaces have survived, but the associated iron railings were unfortunately lost during the scrap metal drives of World War II.

At the rear, good sized private gardens exist of uniform shape and size except on a few corner plots. These gardens are subdivided for use by the residents of both ground and first floor flats. No formal landscape or planting plan exists at the rear, the overall effect being largely typical of back garden areas throughout Walthamstow.

The main view into the area is from St James Street, between two Warner commercial terraces 2-10 and 12-20. The attractive vista terminates where Leucha Road curves sharply to meet Coppermill Lane, giving the area a sense of enclosure missing from the more typical grid-iron layouts associated with Victorian urban planning.

(viii) Prevalent and traditional building materials, textures and colours:

As with most late 19th century residential developments, brick and slate are the predominant building materials. Both yellow London stocks and soft red bricks were used extensively on the Leucha Road properties, and the roofs were universally finished in grey Welsh slates. Sadly the properties were reroofed in grey imitation slates in 1990.

All original windows and doors were in painted softwood and this still largely the case today. By the 1960's/70's Warner housing was clearly distinguished by a green and cream colour scheme for all joinery, although some elderly residents have stated that this itself was a replacement for original wood-grained effects. When acquired by the Council in the 1960's all joinery except front doors was redecorated in an off-white, and the doors themselves painted in a pale and inappropriate "Council-house"

blue. With many properties now privately-owned, more suitable, darker colours have become more commonplace, in keeping with the age of the properties.

(ix) Local details:

The Leucha Road properties are typical in many respects of countless other streets laid out by Warners before the first World War, utilising mass produced items such as clay chimney pots, cast iron door furniture, timber sash windows etc The painted timber front doors are however peculiar to Warner estates, featuring a distinctive cruciform arrangement of windows above the middle rail. Their arrangement in pairs under wide arched porches is another distinctive feature.

(x) The contribution made by green spaces, hedges and other natural or cultivated elements to the character of the area:

The Warner estate company planted privet hedges and creepers in the front gardens of their properties, and trees in the streets, as they realised that the value and desirability of their properties was enhanced by their pleasant appearance.

Many of the original privet hedges survive, giving some sense of enclosure and privacy to the front gardens, and forming a soft edge to the boundary with the public highway.

The footpaths on either side of Leucha Road are still planted with ornamental trees which both reinforce and soften the formal townscape. In this case the trees are relatively recent replacements, planted by the Council, for those originally planted by Warners themselves.

(xi) The setting of the Conservation Area and its relationship with the landscape or open countryside, including definition of significant landmarks, vistas and panoramas, where appropriate:

The Conservation Area forms an integral part of the high density 19th century residential development which characterises much of Walthamstow. The low-lying nature of the area means that distant views, both in and out, are restricted, and the only vista of any significance is the view down Leucha Road from St James Street.

Just 100 metres away from Leucha Road the original country house of the Warner family still survives, although in much reduced circumstances. Clock House is a substantial Grade II Listed Regency villa recently re-converted back to residential use, and it stands as a poignant reminder of the dramatic changes that occurred in the late 19th century, and the central role played by the Warner family in the development of this part of Walthamstow.

(xii) The extent of loss, intrusion or damage. ie the negative factors:

The basic form of the residential properties in the Conservation Area viewed from the street is largely original, and negative elements relate mainly to loss of original features and inappropriate alterations and additions.

The replacement of the natural slate roofs with artificial slate, the loss of chimney pots and stone finials undoubtedly detracts from the originality and interest of the roofscape. With only one exception, original pattern doors and timber sash windows however are to be found and no street elevations have been painted or rendered, so the general uniform streetscene is largely as originally conceived. The loss of the original front boundary railings is however still keenly felt, most notably where the associated privet hedges have also been removed. The mature hedges provide a soft evergreen boundary between the public and private areas, and their loss detracts from the character of the street scene and the privacy of the front gardens. The introduction of wheelie bins into these front garden areas is also seen as having a profoundly negative effect on the special character of the area, particularly where screening hedges have been removed.

The unauthorised installation of satellite dishes on the street elevation of numerous properties undoubtedly has a detrimental impact on the special interest of the area and is currently the subject of enforcement/relocation action.

The commercial terraces fronting St James Street have suffered particularly badly from unsympathetic alterations, particularly inappropriate new shopfronts and signage which detract from their special interest. The loss of most of the original decorative terracotta "griffins" that originally adorned the pilasters between shop units has also had a detrimental affect, as has the lack of routine maintenance to the exterior of most of the upper floors. The recently refurbishment at number 16, Compucare, is an exemplar for the rest of the terraces.

(xiii) The existence of any neutral areas:

The Conservation Area is compact and self-contained, and the layout is entirely as originally built. There are therefore no additional areas within it which neither enhance nor detract from its character or appearance.

Guy Osborne
CONSERVATION OFFICER

MANAGEMENT PROPOSALS

Leucha Road Conservation Area

(i) Legislative background

The designation of a Conservation Area and production of an Appraisal document is not an end in itself. The Appraisal provides the basis for developing management proposals for the Conservation Area that fulfil the general duty placed on the local authority under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, now formalised in BV 219c, to draw up and publish such proposals. The purpose of this document is to present draft proposals which seek to achieve the preservation and enhancement of the special character of the Conservation Area, informed by the Appraisal, for consultation. The special qualities of the Conservation Area have been identified as part of the appraisal process in the first part of this document, and both will be subject to monitoring and review. This guidance draws on the themes identified in the Appraisal, and satisfies the statutory requirement of section 71(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, namely:

"It shall be the duty of the local planning authority from time to time to formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of any parts of their area which are Conservation Areas".

This document reflects Government guidance set out in Planning Policy Guidance 15 "Planning and the Historic Environment", English Heritage guidance set out in "Guidance on the Management of Conservation Areas", policies within the Waltham Forest Unitary Development Plan 2006, and guidance contained in the published Conservation Area leaflet for the area.

(ii) Statutory controls

Designation as a Conservation Area brings with it a degree of additional statutory protection under planning legislation aimed at assisting the "preservation or enhancement" of the area. These controls include the need for Conservation Area consent for the demolition of any unlisted buildings, the need for planning consent for the installation of satellite dishes visible from the street, significantly reduced "permitted development rights" for alterations and extensions to dwelling houses, restrictions on advertising, and 6 weeks written notice of works to trees not already protected by Tree Preservation Orders. These restrictions are outlined in more detail in the Council's guidance leaflet "Leucha Road Conservation Area". It should be noted that flats, shops, and flats above shops do not in any case enjoy "permitted development rights", and nearly all external works which affect the appearance of properties within the area require planning permission.

Action: The Council will ensure that new development within the Conservation Area preserves or enhances the character or appearance of the area in accordance with policy BHE13 of the adopted Unitary Development Plan 2006 and other published guidance.

(iii) Erosion of character and additional planning control

The Conservation Area Appraisal identified the following as works which pose a threat to, or detract from, the special character of the Conservation Area:

- Loss of original timber windows, doors, and door furniture.
- Unauthorised erection of satellite dishes on street elevations.
- The loss of front garden privet hedges.
- The presence of unattractive and unscreened wheelie bins in front gardens.
- Gaudy and inappropriate shopfronts, security shutters and projecting signs.
- Gaudy and overly large advertising.
- The loss of the "mythical beasts" from the pilasters between the shopfronts on St James Street.

Regrettably there are numerous examples of unauthorised works having been carried out, which both individually and cumulatively detract from the special character or appearance of the area. If left unchecked such works will gradually erode the special qualities that justified the original designation. The Council will therefore take appropriate enforcement action, where it is expedient, to remove unauthorised works.

On a positive note, the Council has produced a Conservation Area Guidance leaflet for residents and businesses within the Leucha Road area, and subject to resources provides grant aid towards the cost of repair or restoration of original features. The commercial properties on St James Street have also benefited from high levels of grant aid available over the last three years through the Walthamstow St James HERS scheme funded through English Heritage and the SRB.

Action: The Council will ensure that unauthorised development is subject to effective enforcement action wherever practicable, to protect the special character or appearance of the Conservation Area.

(iv) Shopfronts

The Conservation Area contains a number of commercial premises fronting St James Street with shopfronts divided by pilasters, once adorned by decorative "mythical beasts". Most of the latter features were removed during the early 1990's along with considerable alterations to shopfronts. Combined with overly large or gaudy fascias and signage, many shops are now unsympathetic in appearance with the original architectural character of the area and the Council will be seeking improvements whenever planning permission is required.

Action: The Council will seek the retention of shopfronts which contribute to the special character or appearance of the Conservation Area. Proposals for alterations or new shopfronts will need to preserve or enhance the special character of the area

in accordance with UDP policies and other guidance. In addition the Council will seek to reinstate the missing "mythical beasts" from the pilasters as a condition of any shopfront approval. Grant assistance may be available from the Council to achieve this objective, subject to resources.

(v) Advertisements and signage

On the St James Street frontages and the return flanks in Leucha Road it is important that strict controls are maintained over the design and size of signage and advertising in order to preserve the special character of the area.

Action: The Council will ensure that all advertising and signage proposals that require planning consent will respect the character and appearance of the Conservation Area in terms of siting, size, number, materials, colours, illumination etc in accordance with UDP and other best practice guidance. Wherever possible the Council will take enforcement action against unauthorised advertising and signage which does not preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the area.

(vi) Trees

If not already protected by a Tree Preservation Order, anyone intending to lop or fell a tree within the Conservation Area greater than 100mm in diameter at 1.5 metres above ground level, is required to give the Council 6 weeks written notice before starting work. This provides the Council with an opportunity of assessing the tree to see if it makes a positive contribution to the character or appearance of the Conservation Area, in which case a Tree Preservation Order may be served. Free professional advice on all tree issues, whether the pruning of existing trees or advice on suitable species for planting, is always available from Council Tree Officers.

Action: The Council will consider the use of Tree Preservation Orders wherever appropriate where a tree of high amenity value is considered to be under threat. These will include trees within and outside the area where they contribute to the setting of the Conservation Area or views identified in the Appraisal. The Council will maintain and replace as necessary the street trees in Leucha Road, and continue to provide free professional advice on all tree matters as required.

(vii) Setting and views

The urban context of the Conservation Area, it's "setting", is very important, and development which would not preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the area or its setting, or which would impact detrimentally on views into and out of the area will be resisted. The important views are identified in the Character Appraisal, and the Council will seek to ensure that all new development respects these views.

Action: The Council will seek to ensure that all development respects the setting of the Conservation Area and important views within, into, and out of the area identified in the Appraisal. These will be protected from inappropriate forms of development.

(viii) The public realm and enhancement

The Appraisal has identified only small elements of surviving original floorscape within the Conservation Area such as the granite kerbs, but the area generally has been resurfaced using both tarmac, and new blockwork paving on St James Street. The street calming works along Leucha Road, with associated highway signage, inevitably detracts visually from the quality of the public realm but are necessary evils to prevent rat-running through the area. Lighting in Leucha Road is provided by replica "Victorian pattern" streetlights, which are attractive and make a positive contribution to the special character of the street. The more contemporary fittings in St James St are related to the wider Town Centre street furniture, and as such have little in common with the architecture of the Conservation Area. They are however of good quality, and are considered to be a neutral feature in the context of the character or appearance of the Conservation Area.

The reinstatement of traditional paving flags in Leucha Road would enhance the character and appearance of the area and reinforce its special identity. An audit of the public realm should be undertaken to identify redundant features, opportunities for enhancement etc, subject to resources.

Action: The Council will seek to ensure that any surviving historic streetscape features are retained, and that any future highway works will bring a positive improvement to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area in accordance with the spirit of the English Heritage "Streets for all" campaign

(ix) Monitoring and review

The following actions need to be taken to ensure that this appraisal and management plan are accepted and acted upon:

- Public Consultation: The appraisal and management plan will be subject to a period of public consultation and views expressed as part of that process will be considered when preparing the final draft for Council adoption. Consultation will include placing the documents on the Council website, in libraries and council offices, consultation with local amenity groups and residents associations where they exist, and providing hard copies on request. A letter advising of these arrangements will be delivered to all properties in the area by mail shot.
- Boundary review: The Council will maintain the current boundary of the Conservation Area and continue to review it over time in accordance with Best Practice and guidance on the management of the historic environment produced by English Heritage.
- Document review: This document should be reviewed every five years in the light of the Local Development Framework and emerging government policy. A review should include the following:

(i) A survey of the Conservation Area and its boundaries
(ii) An updated "heritage count" comprising a comprehensive photographic record.
(iii) An assessment of whether the management proposals detailed in this document have been acted upon, including proposed enhancements.

(iv) The production of a short report detailing the findings of the survey and proposed actions and amendments.

(v) Public consultation on the review findings, any proposed changes, and input into the final review.

Guy Osborne
CONSERVATION OFFICER